



Democratic Faith (New Forum Books)

Patrick Deneen

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The American political reformer Herbert Croly wrote, "For better or worse, democracy cannot be disentangled from an aspiration toward human perfectibility." *Democratic Faith* is at once a trenchant analysis and a powerful critique of this underlying assumption that informs democratic theory. Patrick Deneen argues that among democracy's most ardent supporters there is an oft-expressed belief in the need to "transform" human beings in order to reconcile the sometimes disappointing reality of human self-interest with the democratic ideal of selfless commitment. This "transformative impulse" is frequently couched in religious language, such as the need for political "redemption." This is all the more striking given the frequent accompanying condemnation of traditional religious belief that informs the "democratic faith."

At the same time, because so often this democratic ideal fails to materialize, democratic faith is often subject to a particularly intense form of disappointment. A mutually reinforcing cycle of faith and disillusionment is frequently exhibited by those who profess a democratic faith--in effect imperiling democratic commitments due to the cynicism of its most fervent erstwhile supporters.

Deneen argues that democracy is ill-served by such faith. Instead, he proposes a form of "democratic realism" that recognizes democracy not as a regime with aspirations to perfection, but that justifies democracy as the regime most appropriate for imperfect humans. If democratic faith aspires to transformation, democratic realism insists on the central importance of humility, hope, and charity.

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